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PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY. II

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3. CHRIST'S COMING

For Paul, as for all Christians of his age, the messianic coming was a belief necessary to the Christian system. Then only would Jesus enter upon his office of Messiah. It is worthy of note that the New Testament uses the term "advent"—*parousia*—not "second advent." The messianic manifestation was yet to come. As in the case of the course of history, Paul's picture of the advent in his early writings was taken from the apocalyptic writings: "The Lord himself shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God" (I Thess. 4:16). The figures go back to the Old Testament pictures of the "glory of Jehovah," who "maketh the clouds his chariot" (Ps. 104:3) and whose voice is the thunders. The messianic kingdom figured by a "son of man" comes "on the clouds of heaven" in Dan. 7:13, while the sound of the trumpet accompanies the coming of the Messiah in both Christian (Matt. 24:31) and Jewish tradition (II Esdr. 6:23). The same pictorial ideas are in Paul's mind in I Cor. 15:52, when he thinks of the resurrection as accompanied by a trumpet call to rouse the dead.

How much stress are we to suppose Paul put on such pictorial details? This is a modern question which we have no reason to suppose Paul ever raised. The real value of the promise lay in the triumph and reign of Christ, but this idea must ever form itself in pictures—the very words used above, "triumph" and "reign," are pictorial. To attempt to draw a line between concept and picture is a modern refinement of thought. Evidently Paul thought of the messianic advent in terms of picture.

The coming of the Messiah must be before the kingdom, for he is to slay the lawless one by the breath of his mouth (II Thess. 2:8) and to put down powers and forces and all enemies (I Cor.

15:24, 25), and his followers shall reign with him (I Cor. 6:2, 3). In Paul's mind, the reward of the believer rested upon the reality of this messianic advent and reign; but whether it was to be on earth, as in Enoch, chaps. 1–36, or in a "new heaven and a new earth," as in Enoch, chaps. 37–70, and Revelation, he nowhere suggests. True, the living and the dead meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4:17), and he conquers powers and principalities, which Ephesians seems to think of as belonging to the region of the air (2:2), that region where Gnosticism placed the lower and more evil superhuman forces. Paul expresses himself too vaguely, however, to afford much ground for solid conclusions on this subject. He has spiritualized the conception, but not localized the place, of the Messiah's reign. One may suppose that he has followed the more general Jewish thought of a reign of the Messiah upon earth, but its quality, not its locality, is his main thought.

4. THE RESURRECTION

If the messianic reign was necessary to early Christianity, the resurrection of believers was not less so. Paul stated words of truth for his own time when he said that if the dead rise not, Christians are of all men most miserable. The problem of the Thessalonian Christians was quite to the point. Granted a Messiah in the future, what would it avail to any person who died before his advent? Men now often profess to be glad enough to work for future generations, even if they are in no proper sense to share the results. That is not the way Paul, or any early Christian, looked at life. Evidently it is not the way that Pharisaic theology, which had developed the idea of the resurrection, looked at life. Reward was a personal thing, else it was no reward at all.

Of this subject again we have two treatments, the earlier of which is more pictorial than the later. The Thessalonian Christians had raised a question of fact, not a speculation of objections. They seem, so imperfect was their Christian knowledge, to have gathered from Paul that no Christian would die before the coming of the messianic kingdom. When some of these members died, the natural question was, "What then was the value of their faith

for them?" Paul answers with the common Pharisaic doctrine of resurrection, put in common apocalyptic figures. He adopts that variety of Jewish thought which places the resurrection at the beginning of the messianic reign, at the very first appearance of the glory of Christ, so that the dead "meet the Lord in the air," and miss no item of the reward which comes to the followers of Jesus. For this faith, which is in accord with some of the apocalyptic pictures, Paul claims "a word of the Lord." No saying of Jesus in the form now embodied in the gospels will satisfy this condition. Matt. 24:30, 31 comes nearest to it, but has nothing about the resurrection of the dead. One must either think of some unknown saying of Jesus, or of something which had come to Paul in those experiences he regarded as revelations from Christ (Gal. 1:12; II Cor. 12:4).

The Thessalonians were only concerned with the fact of the resurrection. They demanded no explanation of the belief, nor any proof of it. As the second letter shows, they accepted it only too readily and uncritically. Some years later Paul again had occasion to touch upon the subject, in I Cor., chap. 15. Here explanation was demanded. Objections to the doctrine itself had been raised, based upon the absurdity of the resurrection of the body. How could the body be raised? the speculative Corinthians argued. It was laid in the grave and dissipated by corruption. What body was left for resurrection? Raising from the dead could not be literal. It must be figurative. Did not the figure fit into Paul's own preaching? He was always talking of a new life. The real resurrection is the new life, into which all Christians have entered. The resurrection is past. It is real, but spiritual; not connected with a raised body, which is an absurd idea, but with a renewed spirit. Thus the Corinthians had, to their own mind, rationalized the resurrection and made it a reasonable belief. Paul's answer consists of two parts: a statement and an explanation. The statement is that the future resurrection of the Christian is a fact, based upon Christ's resurrection. The explanation is that their objection to the resurrection of the fleshly body does not hold, because the fleshly body will not be raised. At this point Paul departs from the common Jewish view of the resur-

rection. That view presented a fleshly, bodily life, the counterpart of the present life. Its best biblical statement is in the question the Sadducees asked Christ about the woman who had been the wife of seven husbands: Whose wife shall she be in the resurrection? The Pharisees could not answer it because they, like the Corinthians, conceived of the resurrection as a life under earthly conditions. Jesus in his answer struck the note which a Pharisaic work reproduced before the end of the century, that in the resurrection men are "like unto the angels" (see Apoc. of Baruch, chap. 51). Whether Paul knew of this answer of Jesus spiritualizing the idea of the resurrection life is an insoluble problem. It is more probable that he came to his opinion by three means: first, the constant objections to a bodily resurrection which he must have met in the centers of Greek culture. The compactness of expression and felicity of illustration in I Cor., chap. 15, are marks of style indicating a subject to which much previous attention has been given. They show that Paul had often argued this matter before. It could hardly have been difficult for a keen Greek to drive a Jew from the defenses of a literal bodily resurrection. Second, Paul's distinction between flesh and spirit must have lent aid to the process. The flesh is not identical with sin, but the flesh and sin are closely connected in Paul's thought. In vs. 50 he lays it down as an axiom, needing no argument or defense, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Third, his experience on the road to Damascus gave him a direct knowledge of the spiritual body of Christ, the model upon which the spiritual bodies of Christians are fashioned. This vision may well have been the starting-point of Paul's frequent expressions of exaltation applied to the resurrection body—"glory," "power," "heavenly," "spiritual body." The student of Paul must never forget the tremendous influence wielded in his life by his conviction that he had seen with his own eyes the glorified Christ, not in vision, but in reality.

Paul presents no theory of the nature of the resurrection body. The concept lies in his mind in terms of function, not of substance. It is such a body as is fitted for a spiritual life. That means, it is

heavenly, as the present body is earthly; and he gives no further definition of "the manner of body" with which the dead are raised. In rabbinical thought the hope of a perfect body in the resurrection is expressed; but the halt and the blind and those with other infirmities will be raised as they were on earth for purposes of identification, then immediately changed (Bereshith Rabba, 95). The same treatise also (28) attempts to meet the problem of the destruction of the present body, and presents the theory that the resurrection body is built up from a certain indestructible fragment of the backbone. Paul avoids the need of such explanations by assuming a body itself glorified and spiritualized at the resurrection. This body has no connection with the fleshly body. The same life is embodied here in a sensuous (natural) body, there in a spiritual body. The figure of the seed sown does not point to the body laid in the grave as the seed from which the resurrection body is formed. The present life, not the body laid in the grave, is the seed. The resurrection body is the fruit. The life takes to itself various forms, but the form is not the life. The corruption and weakness of the sensuous body (vss. 42–44) describes life in this world, from which a new spiritual body will arise. It does not describe the dead and decaying fleshly body. The resurrection life comes from life, not from death. The relation of the resurrection body is with the spirit, not with the sensuous body.

To this idea that the spiritual life, not the body, is the seed from which the resurrection body comes, II Cor. 5:1–5 conforms. A body is the robe of the spirit. The Christian wishes not to be disrobed but to be robed in a spiritual garb. This spiritual robe is not made from the earthly robe, but is the direct gift of God. That which is mortal is not transformed into the immortal, but is displaced by it, "swallowed up of life." The spiritual body is like that of Christ. It is his spirit in the believer which makes the life that is enabled to pass unfettered through the bonds of death. It is Christ's life within that makes the Christian's life possible. But Christ's life embodied itself after death. Paul had seen that embodiment. He had experience, then, of the fact of the resurrection and of the glorious nature of the resurrection

body. Christ was the first fruits. The others were like, but later (I Cor. 15:20).

What of non-Christian men? Paul has no place for them in the resurrection. Since the resurrection is caused by the spirit of Christ which the believer shares, there can in the nature of the case be no resurrection for them. They possess no divine life to carry them safely through the portals of death. He never discusses their fate. He promises "eternal life" to the obedient, and "wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish" to the evil (Rom. 2:6–10), but does not say that they will be raised from the dead to receive punishment. Dan. 12:2 states plainly a belief in a resurrection to punishment. The fact that Paul does not, and that his scheme of thought has no logical place for any such idea, amounts, at the least, to very strong presumptive evidence that he held to no resurrection life for the non-Christian. The resurrection is limited to the Christians.

One sees immediately that Paul's idea of the resurrection is in no sense a theory of immortality. The soul is not naturally immortal. Eternal life is the gift of God. Socrates in the *Phaedo* arguing for the deathlessness of the soul and Paul in Corinthians arguing for the resurrection are in separate and mutually exclusive spheres of thought. Paul's resurrection would have been meaningless superstition to Socrates, and Socrates' immortality would have been false philosophy to Paul. We are heirs to both ideas, but that is no reason why we should not see that each was irreconcilable with the other.

5. THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

What of the believer in the period between death and the resurrection? Paul, using the common phraseology of his day, often speaks of this time as a sleep. No dogmatic conclusion can be drawn from the use of this word. It was an early and natural euphemism for death, used, among many other nations, both by Hebrews ("to lie down," the meaning also of the Greek word Paul usually uses, Deut. 31:16, Job 7:21, I Kings 2:10, and often), and in Greek epitaphs and literature (*Iliad* 11. 241, Soph. *Electra* 509). In these uses there is no implication of a resurrection.

When the belief in the resurrection developed, the term was still used (Dan 12:2 and often in Jewish writings), but the use proves no special theory of the intermediate state. Two passages in Paul's letters seem to bear on this question: II Cor. 5:1–10; Phil. 1:21–23. There are three possibilities of interpretation: (1) The resurrection follows death immediately. In this case, Paul has changed his ideas. He no longer thinks of the resurrection as a spectacular event, as in the Thessalonian letters. He is no longer apocalyptic in his thought.[1] Such a radical change of thought should be assumed only as a last resort. (2) The intermediate state is not unconscious, but is a conscious life, in union with Christ, embodied in some form, though not in the resurrection body. It must be admitted that Hebrew thought occasionally exhibits certain kindred ideas. But this view makes the resurrection a useless event; belief in it a mere survival of past thought. Paul's religion seems to be built upon the resurrection too firmly to allow the introduction of so discordant an idea. (3) Paul overlooks entirely the time of the intermediate state. That is not the subject he is discussing in either of the passages. In II Cor. he is contrasting the things temporal with things eternal (4:18). This earthly abiding-place and all which belongs to it lies in the temporal. The life with Christ lies in the eternal. Union with Christ is never broken. That belongs to the eternal; and after the temporal is gone, God will still prepare a way for its embodiment. In Phil. 1:21 he is concerned with the same abiding element of the Christian life. Death makes no break in the union with Christ. Paul is Christ's no matter what may come. He is not here discussing the kind of life after death, but expressing his positive confidence that neither life nor death can separate him from Christ. It is not fitting to set this exuberant expression of Christian faith at the ungracious task of undermining the doctrine of resurrection which elsewhere enters so logically and fundamentally into the

[1] Holtzmann, *N.T. Theol.;* Schmiedel on I Cor. (*Hand-Kom.*); Charles, *Eschatology* (pp. 395–401), where stress is laid on the present tense in 5:1; immediately after death we have a building from God. H. S. Thackeray, *The Relation of St. Paul to Contemporaneous Jewish Thought*, 31 f., suggests a dependence upon the Wisdom of Solomon, and an incomplete approach to its doctrine of the immortality of the soul, though not, as in that Alexandrian book, to the exclusion of a bodily resurrection.

very structure of Paul's faith.[2] This seems to the writer the best interpretation of these passages. It leaves us, however, with no statement which gives us any inkling of Paul's view of the intermediate state. We can only say that the problem seems to have had no particular religious importance in his mind.

6. THE JUDGMENT

This interpretation will also help to make Paul's theory of the judgment self-consistent. In II Cor. 5:10 the judgment stands in the same connection with death as does the "clothing with the heavenly habitation." Elsewhere, the judgment is placed at the beginning of the messianic reign. Christ will judge the world (Rom. 14:10, 12), sitting on "the judgment seat of God." This judgment tests men's works (II Cor. 5:10), but is to be given not only in accord with what men have done, but in the light of their opportunities (Rom., chap. 2). Nay, men may even present for judgment deeds which are only worthy of condemnation, yet themselves be saved (I Cor. 3:12–15). It is evident that the old Jewish conception of "a day of Jehovah" has received by Paul an ethical interpretation which makes it a day of purification as well as a day of punishment. He has, however, given no complete discussion of his theory of it. Nor has he attempted to expound any theory of the position of the unbeliever in the judgment. He seems to assume in the passages referred to above that all men will appear at the judgment, yet, as we have seen, neither his words nor the logic of his thought provide any place for the resurrection of the unbeliever. Yet the sphere of the judgment is in the world of the resurrection. Here seems to be an unsolved antinomy. Paul, however, leaves it no more confused than do certain Jewish apocalyptic writers. The figures of condemnation, death, destruction, used of the enemies of Israel, are often not carried out to any logical conclusions. The Christian church has sometimes tried to make complete doctrines where both Paul and his Jewish contemporaries offered only suggestive expressions.

[2] See Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things*, 262–74.

7. THE FINAL ISSUE

The final issue of the course of history is also based on Jewish conceptions. In Judaism the emphasis was, after all, not upon the Messiah, but upon God. The Messiah is a means for accomplishing the will of God. To God must be the glory. Important as the Messiah was in Paul's thought, still God was supreme, and Christ existed not for his own sake, but to bring men to God. It is fitting, then, that at the last, after the work of the Messiah is completed, he should give up the kingdom to God, so that God should be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:25–28). The process of bringing the world into subjection to God is stated in apocalyptic terms. Enemies are to be put down. The last enemy to be overcome is death. Sin and the supernatural powers of evil now dominant in the world, under whose oppression the world now groans (Rom. 8:22), will be overthrown. The saints, through this union with Christ, will rule with him and judge even supernatural beings (I Cor. 6:3). At last all the world will be brought into submisssion to Christ, as God's representative and vicegerent. Then Christ will give up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. And then?—Paul does not go farther.

If all the world is subdued to God, does this imply that evil and rebellion to God no longer exist in the world? Paul believes in the present existence, not only of evil men, but of evil powers above men. What is to become of them? Shall we read literally Paul's single use of "eternal destruction" (II Thess. 1:9), and his occasional use of "perishing" (II Thess. 2:10), and conceive him as thinking of evil men and angels as dead, blotted out, wiped off the face of existence, as an incorrect sum is wiped off the slate? That would seem to be a logical conclusion from his thought of the resurrection as caused by the spirit of Christ, by which we possess a life able to pass through the gates of death. Or shall we lay stress on passages like I Cor. 15:22–28; Rom. 11:32, and conclude that Paul's idea of the supremacy of God provided a place for the restoration of all souls, human and superhuman, to harmony with him? The marshaling of the entire body of texts which could bear in any way on the subject would leave us with the same antinomy as the more evident passages mentioned above. The

whole subject of God's final dealing with evil men lay out of the center of Paul's religious attention. He seems never to have formulated the subject in a final and self-consistent theory. When he thinks of God as supreme, he pictures all the realm of existence as bowing before his feet. When he thinks of the deserved punishment of evil, he uses terms which imply ultimate and irremediable ruin of soul. Circumstances never forced him to form a final judgment. It is well for us not to attempt to form one for him, or to try to show what he would have concluded had he been obliged to conclude something.

This position of incomplete theory is not strange. We have seen that the subject was not in the center of Paul's religious thought. It is a general experience that opinions regarding matters on the periphery of attention are borrowed, not original. A great thinker may be original in the one subject to which he has given his life, but in all others he usually reflects more or less perfectly his mental environment. Paul's environment of Hebrew thought gave him no settled and consistent theory of the final fate of evil men. Like Paul himself, it was more interested in the destiny of good men. There was a confident belief that God would triumph, and what would become of the defeated enemy, nobody really cared. Evil was to be defeated; that was enough.

8. THE INFLUENCE OF PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY

Paul's eschatology seems to have had little influence in the early centuries of the church. His theory of the resurrection was flatly contradicted by the Old Roman Symbol from which came the Apostles' Creed. He held that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," but this symbol affirms belief "in the resurrection of the flesh." The literal fleshly resurrection is maintained, in opposition to Gnosticism, by Ignatius, Tertullian, and other church writers, who sometimes try to reconcile the Pauline writings and sometimes not.[3]

Pauline eschatology had no very great influence in molding

[3] For a statement of the reasons for this anti-Pauline position see in *Biblical World* for December, 1910, the paper on "The Religious Value of the Resurrection of Jesus in the Early Church," by the present writer.

Christian thought on the subject at any time previous to the Reformation. The flight of years soon disposed of Paul's expectation of the speedy second coming of the Messiah. The Greek idea of immortality took the place of his theory of resurrection. The apocalyptic figures which entered popular thought came rather from Daniel and Revelation than from Paul's less spectacular apocalyptic passages. The popular delight in pictures of the sufferings of the lost found little support in Paul's almost total omission of any mention of the fate of the wicked. The conceptions of heaven were usually far from Paul's mystic union with Christ, and so with God. Paul was both too spiritual and too colorless for an eschatology so vivid in imagination and so materialistic in conception as that of the pre-Reformation church.

The Reformation was a Pauline renaissance; but of all departments of theology, eschatology was perhaps least affected by Pauline conceptions. It had become too fixed; fertile imaginations had played too long about a picturesque eschatology to allow much change, unless the subject came into the center of thought; and eschatology was not in the center of Reformation thought. So it happens that an eschatology largely non-Pauline came to be part of the professedly Pauline Protestant theology. It was non-Pauline in its assumption of the natural immortality of the soul; its theory of judgment immediately following death; its positive assertions about the fate of the wicked. Yet the study of Paul influenced Protestant conceptions. One of the most striking influences was in the change in the clause regarding the resurrection in the Apostles' Creed from the "flesh" of both the Latin and the Greek forms to the more Pauline "body," as it stands in the English Prayerbook today. Even this change is incomplete, for the form of the creed used in the English church (not in the American Episcopal prayerbooks) in the ceremony of baptism keeps to this day the earlier and more correct English translation "flesh." But in spite of such evidences of Pauline influence, there is no classical system of Protestant theology which conforms strictly to Pauline eschatology. On the contrary, nearly every system contains some elements which are extra-Pauline, and a few which are anti-Pauline.

The present value of Paul's eschatology does not depend upon the acceptance of its theories. The church never has and never can accept his theories in all respects. This is equally true of his theories of the resurrection and of the second coming. His speculations as to the events of the resurrection and as to the nature of the spiritual body are interesting speculations, but the Christian will remember that they are Paul's personal opinions, on the basis of inherited religious beliefs. They are suggestive, but not authoritative. Their real value is on their religious side, rather than their theological side. They are revelations of Paul as a religious man, and such revelations are always inspiring to others. What the world needs is to grasp the principles which guided the lives and thought of its religious leaders. The content of thought will change as the generations move; the attitude of man to God expressed in religious principles remains the same.

That man is directly responsible to God; that divine justice will be done somewhere in the universe; that Christ gives a sense of spiritual life found nowhere else; that God will finally triumph over evil; that the meaning of life, whether present or future, is spiritual and not material; these are some of the abiding religious convictions which stand behind the Pauline eschatology. The words of Professor Bruce on the last page of *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, in speaking of I Cor., chap. 15, the great chapter on the resurrection, will apply to all Paul's eschatology: "Beyond one or two leading statements, such as that affirming the certainty of the future life, I should be slow to summarize its contents in definite theological formulae. I had rather read this chapter as a Christian man seeking religious edification and moral inspiration, than as a theologian in quest of positive dogmatic teaching."[4]

[4] See also the excellent concluding paragraph of "A Study of a Pauline Apocalypse," by Professor D. A. Hayes, *Biblical World*, March, 1911.